

CLAIMS

Claims 1-31 (canceled)

32. (currently amended) A method of processing articles within a vacuum chamber and moving the articles between the vacuum chamber and the outside through a load lock chamber, during sequential time intervals, comprising:

during a first time interval, opening the load lock chamber to the outside while remaining closed to the vacuum chamber, simultaneously removing a previously processed first batch of one or more articles from the load lock chamber to the outside and loading a second batch of one or more articles from the outside into the load lock chamber, while a third batch of one or more articles is being processed in the vacuum chamber,

during a second time interval, closing the load lock chamber to the outside, reducing the pressure within the load lock chamber to substantially that of the vacuum chamber, and opening the load lock chamber to the vacuum chamber, while the third batch of one or more articles is being processed in the vacuum chamber,

during a third time interval, simultaneously moving the second batch of one or more articles from the load lock chamber to the vacuum chamber and moving the third batch of one or more articles from the vacuum chamber to the load lock chamber,

during a fourth time interval, closing the load lock chamber from the vacuum chamber and then venting the load lock chamber to the outside, while the second batch of one or more articles is being processed in the vacuum chamber, and

during a fifth time interval, opening the load lock chamber to the outside while remaining closed to the vacuum chamber, simultaneously removing the third batch of one or more articles from the load lock chamber to the outside and loading a fourth batch of one or more articles from the outside into the load lock chamber, while the second batch of one or more articles is being processed in the vacuum chamber,

wherein moving and processing the first, second, third and fourth batches of one or more articles includes moving a domed surface carrying a plurality of integrated circuit wafers and processing said integrated circuit wafers, and

wherein ~~a~~ the domed surface is formed of a plurality of wedge shaped pieces that are removeably placed together on a frame, and each of the moving and removing of a domed surface includes sequentially moving one of the wedge shaped pieces at a time.

33. (original) A method of moving a plurality of integrated circuit wafers from one location to another location, comprising: positioning the plurality of wafers across a plurality of wedge shaped pieces that are fit together on a first frame to form a domed surface, moving one of the wedge shaped pieces at a time from the first frame to a second frame until all of said plurality of wedge shaped pieces are moved from the first frame to the second frame.

Claims 34-38 (cancelled)